

PUBLIC HEARING SUMMARY REPORT

PLANNING BOARD AND YEAR 42 CDBG PROGRAM APPLICANTS

JANUARY 28, 2016

In Attendance:

PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS

Paula Caron, Chair
Michael Hurley
Kristen Sweeney
Michael DiPietro
Paul Fontaine, Jr.
John DisPasquale
Laura O’Kane, Associate

COMMUNITY DEV/PLANNING STAFF

Larry Casassa Mary McCaffrey
Michael O’Hara Liz Murphy
Sue Christensen

CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Michael Kushmerek Paul Beauchemin

Paula Caron opened the meeting at 6:00p.m. Paula explained the purpose of the CDBG hearing. 18 CDBG proposals were received totaling \$1,499,043 million dollars in requests. Approximately \$967,664 in Year 42 funds is available. The CDBG schedule was explained to the audience. The schedule is as follows: the Planning Board will meet on February 16th to discuss the Year 42 proposals and make a recommendation to the Mayor. The Mayor will review the Planning Board’s recommendations and submit his recommendations to the City Council for their review between March 8 – March 15. The proposed Consolidated Plan and Statement of CDBG activities will be published on March 21st. Public comments will be received up to the date of the second public hearing which is scheduled for May 3rd. Submission of the Year 42 Consolidated Plan -Action Plan is in May. The start-up of the new program year begins on July 1, 2016.

Liz Murphy, from the Community Development Department, referred applicants to the handouts provided in the application package (and available on the side table). The CDBG Program regulations were outlined on the green sheets. In order for a project to be eligible it must meet one of the three national objectives which include: benefitting persons of low-moderate income, eliminating slums and blight, or meeting an urgent need. Eligible activities include: public facilities, public services, demolition, economic development, rehab & preservation, planning & administration. For projects serving a low-moderate income area, at least 51% of the households must be at 80% median income or less. There is a 20% cap on planning and admin activities, and a 15% cap on public service activities. It is the city’s responsibility to insure that at least 70% of CDBG funds are used to benefit low-moderate income persons over a three-year period (2014-2016).

Paula Caron explained some housekeeping rules and welcomed comments from the audience. She said Joana Dos Santos from the Cleghorn Neighborhood Center was available to provide Spanish translation.

SUMMARY OF YEAR 42 PROPOSALS AND PAGE INDEX

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>SPONSOR</u>	<u>YR. 42 REQUEST AMOUNT</u>	<u>YR. 41 AWARD AMOUNT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>Sidewalk Accessibility Improvements</u>	<u>Fitchburg Disability Commission</u>	<u>\$30,000</u>	<u>\$55,000</u> (from prior years)	<u>1</u>

Summary: Project funds will be used to bring city sidewalks into compliance with ADA requirements. The project involves adding/improving crosswalks and removal of curbs that are obstructing universal access along Water Street, between Nashua and Fifth Streets, and on South Street near the Hosmer School. Approximately 30 architectural barriers will be removed. Work will be performed by the DPW.

Larry Casassa addressed this application. Project funds will supplement prior years' funding, to provide curb cuts at key locations throughout the city making sidewalks accessible. Work will be completed by the DPW.

<u>Main Street One Lane Conversion Project</u>	<u>Councilor Joel Kaddy and Fitchburg Pride</u>	<u>\$12,000</u>	<u>none</u>	<u>6</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to make Main Street one lane as a traffic calming measure and to improve parking options. Activities include signage, line painting and other pavement markings to delineate the new traffic pattern. Approximately 3,000 linear feet will be made one lane. Work will be performed by the DPW and will be ADA compliant.

Audience members said Joel Kaddy was at another city meeting for the proposed trail in West Fitchburg and was unable to attend.

<u>Allen Place Sidewalk Improvements</u>	<u>Fitchburg Department of Public Works</u>	<u>\$20,000</u>	<u>none</u>	<u>10</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to make approximately 350 linear ft of sidewalk and curb improvements on both sides of Allen Place, starting at Daniels Street. Improvements include replacing sidewalks, raising granite curbs and installing a cap on the retaining wall which runs along the sidewalk adjacent to the Emile Goguen Park. Work will be performed by the DPW and will be ADA compliant.

Lenny Laakso from DPW addressed this application. He said the sidewalks are a safety hazard and not accessible. Cars park on the sidewalk because there is no curb reveal. In addition, the wall along the sidewalk is falling apart. It needs to be capped with mortar and granite slabs.

Patria Brown owns property in the Cleghorn neighborhood and addressed the blight conditions as a result of 9 vacant buildings. She also said her property values have decreased over the years due to neighborhood blight. She is in support of demolition activities.

<u>Twin Cities Rail Trail (TCRT)</u>	<u>Community Development Department</u>	<u>\$ 250,000</u>	<u>none</u>	<u>15</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to cover a portion of the total purchase price of 2.2 miles of abandoned rail banked line in Fitchburg, to create a multi-use trail from Fitchburg to Leominster. The state has committed more than \$12 million in funds to design and construct the TCRT, and a federal earmark of \$2 million has been set aside towards the \$3 million purchase price of the trail. The balance of the purchase price is expected to be borne by the two cities.

Larry Casassa addressed this application. He said the city is in negotiations with CSX to acquire an abandoned rail line. Wetlands flagging and a property survey have already been done. Appraisal of the property is underway. The MA DOT and MA EOEEA have already committed \$12 million for design and construction of the project. \$2million in a federal earmark will only be available after the Purchase and Sale Agreement is signed. A condition of federal funding is a match from both Fitchburg and Leominster. The rail trail will bring people downtown and make Fitchburg a more desirable place to live.

<u>Streetscape Improvements</u>	<u>Community Development Department</u>	<u>\$40,000</u>	<u>\$145,000</u>	<u>19</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to supplement the Year 41 award amount, to make streetscape improvements to the City's Gateways along Water, River and Main Streets. The scope of work may include replacement of approximately 450 lf of sidewalk and curbing, installation of plantings, fencing, and lighting. Work will be performed by the DPW and will be ADA compliant.

Larry Casassa addressed this application. There is a shortfall of funds to complete sidewalk improvements along River Street and projects from prior years including, streetscape improvements on Water Street and in Cleghorn, and improvements to the median strip on Main Street.

<u>Parks and Playgrounds Improvement Project</u>	<u>Community Development Department and Parks Board</u>	<u>\$120,000</u>	<u>\$92,338.71</u>	<u>23</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to match \$244,203 in Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities Program funds (PARC) to make improvements to the First and Railroad Street Park. Activities include the installation of a basketball court and provision of green space for passive recreation and education. The mitigation of storm water runoff is an added benefit of the project. These funds will be used to supplement prior year CDBG funds to continue work on other parks listed on the City's Priority Action Plan for Parks and Playgrounds.

Larry Casassa addressed this application. CDBG funds will be used at First and Railroad Park and is a required match to the PARC grant. The Montachusett Opportunity Council is also providing match funding through an EPA grant. Remaining funds will be used to upgrade the splash pad surface at Parkhill Park and regrade the soccer fields at Coolidge Park.

<u>Optometry Department Build Out & Expansion</u>	<u>Community Health Connections (CHC)</u>	<u>\$65,000</u>	<u>none</u>	<u>28</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to develop unused space at the CHC location. CDBG funds will be used to build one optometry exam room of a two exam room suite. CDBG funds will help secure leveraged resources to complete the project at a cost of \$245,000. The CHC serves North Central Massachusetts. In calendar year 2015, there were 1,817 optometry visits.

No one was present to address this application.

<u>TOTAL PUBLIC FACILITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS PROPOSALS (7)</u>	<u>\$ 537,000.00</u>
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PUBLIC SERVICES

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>SPONSOR</u>	<u>YR. 42 REQUEST AMOUNT</u>	<u>YR. 41 AWARD AMOUNT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>MIHN Family Housing/ Self Sufficiency Program</u>	<u>Montachusett Interfaith Hospitality Network</u>	<u>\$15,000</u>	<u>\$10,000</u>	<u>35</u>

Summary: Project funds will provide emergency housing for homeless families in North Worcester County, including case management and follow up services once a family leaves the shelter. Overnight supervision is provided 7 days a week. It is estimated that 20 families will be served during the program year, of which an estimated 50% or 10 families (unduplicated count) will originate from Fitchburg. Approximately 300 volunteers from 9 local churches assist in the operation of the program which includes the provision of 3 meals a day. Funds will support the salary of the Operations Manager. MIHN recently relocated to 758 Main Street in Leominster. The new location has a 20-bed capacity and can hold up to 3-5 families at one time.

Jon Hogue, Executive Director, and Adam Weber, Board President, addressed this application. This program has paid staff and large volunteer support. The newly acquired property in Leominster was purchased anonymously. It is the only family shelter in the region. The increase in funds is to serve more families. There are 15 families on a waiting list. The case manager works with families to secure and maintain permanent housing. The program receives Fitchburg and Leominster CDBG funds.

<u>Building Leadership & Inspiring Self Sufficiency</u>	<u>United Neighbors of Fitchburg, Inc.</u>	<u>\$73,043.43</u>	<u>\$56,000</u>	<u>44</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to provide an afterschool youth program, information and referral, food pantry, bi-lingual services to Latino residents, GED in Spanish, ESL, citizenship, civic & community engagement at the Cleghorn Neighborhood Center (CNC). Funds will be for staff salaries, additional part-time assistant in the afterschool program, and related administrative costs. The agency operates citywide. It is estimated that 1,100 (unduplicated count) will be served. CNC is located at 2-18 Fairmount Street and the Youth Center at 40 Fairmount Street.

Joana Dos Santos, Executive Director, addressed this application. She indicated that the agency has already met 65% of its goals for the year. They have seen a 30% increase in requests for services including ESL classes, due in part to the economic crisis in Puerto Rico, resulting in many residents coming to Fitchburg. The Center has expanded its community partnerships to include local colleges, the Art Museum, and the Board of Immigration Appeals which certified the Center to legally provide immigration services.

One of the youth from the Center spoke on her personal experience at the Center. She said it benefitted her by providing a safe place to go after school, help with her homework, and offered Teen Night three times a week.

<u>Spartacus Program</u>	<u>Montachusett Regional YMCA</u>	<u>\$10,000</u>	<u>\$10,000</u>	<u>67</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to support staff salary of the Teen Center Spartacus Program, offering services to at-risk youth between the ages of 13 and 18 who live in Fitchburg. Emphasis will be on Youth Development, Healthy Living and Social Responsibility through physical fitness, team building, life skills training and outdoor activities. It is estimated that 50 youth (unduplicated count) will be served. The afterschool program will operate between September and June. The YMCA is located at 55 Wallace Ave in Fitchburg.

Jennifer Gordon and Jill Connell from the YMCA addressed this application. They articulated the success of the Spartacus Program in that they are currently serving 39 participants and hope to reach their goal of 50. The program allows for small peer group sessions to discuss sensitive topics as violence dating and teen pregnancy. The Y took some of the youth on a bus tour of Florida colleges, which was an opportunity for peer-to-peer interaction. The Spartacus Program is a citywide program.

<u>Drug Enforcement And Patrol Program</u>	<u>Fitchburg Police Dept.</u>	<u>\$85,000</u>	<u>\$65,000</u>	<u>78</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to provide for police overtime expenses related to drug investigation activities in the CDBG Strategy Area, and foot/motorcycle/bicycle patrols in the Main Street area. This project will help alleviate drug activity, violent crime and property crime, which will benefit residents and businesses. Police activities include narcotics investigations, surveillance, undercover buys, search warrant services and arrests.

Chief Martineau addressed this application. Some of the highlights from last year included: 33 search warrants resulting in 45 arrests. 314 grams of cocaine, 106 grams of heroin, 2,379 grams of marijuana, 25 fire arms and \$218,000 in currency was seized. The increase in the request amount is to fund foot patrols on Main Street. The Department previously received funds from the Federal Equity Program, which is no longer available.

Councilor Mike Kushmerek said he has heard from businesses and non-profits about improvements to Main Street as a result of police foot patrols.

<u>Transportation Services to Afterschool Program</u>	<u>Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg and Leominster</u>	<u>\$30,000</u>	<u>\$18,000</u>	<u>84</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to provide one-way transportation from Fitchburg schools to the Boys and Girls Club Afterschool Program. The Fitchburg schools include: Memorial, South Street, Reingold, Crocker, McKay, Longsjo, Sizer and Fitchburg High School. It is estimated that approximately 1,440 transportation trips will be provided. This service is for Fitchburg youth between the ages of 8 and 18. It is estimated that 250 Fitchburg youth (unduplicated count) will be served. The Club is located at 365 Lindell Street in Leominster.

Donata Martin, Executive Director, addressed this application. She said the program has already exceeded its goal by serving over 300 Fitchburg youth. CDBG has helped to grow their programs to include Robotics, Environmental Science and many other activities under the STEAM curriculum (science, technology, engineering, arts and math). Four of the youth at the Club were recipients of the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship Award. Students have volunteered in MOC's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program as part of giving back to the community. The cost of the Fitchburg transportation program is \$55,000 per year.

<u>Fitchburg Employment Plus Program</u>	<u>My Turn, Inc.</u>	<u>\$15,000</u>	<u>none</u>	<u>97</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to pay for staff salary and offer paid Internships; Occupational Trainings, including OSHA, Construction, Human Service credentials and ServSafe; Supportive Services; and Tuition Assistance, to provide at-risk Fitchburg youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years with alternative education and employment training programs, with the goal of making a livable wage. It is estimated that 35 Fitchburg residents (unduplicated count) will be served. The agency is located at 14 Summer Street in Fitchburg.

Allison Joseph, Executive Director, addressed this application. She said the program's focus has shifted from GED to HiSet, along with helping program participants identify career tracks by reviewing labor statistics to determine growth industries, and engaging students in paid internships. The agency had a student in a paid internship at the Boys and Girls Club. Wages were paid by Employment Links, Inc.

Larry Casassa reminded the Board and audience that there is a 15% cap on this category. Due to less program income available in Year 42, it is expected that there will be \$7,000 reduction from the Year 41 amount (\$159,000) in the public service category.

<u>TOTAL PUBLIC SERVICE PROPOSALS (6)</u>	<u>\$228,043.43</u>
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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>SPONSOR</u>	<u>YR. 42 REQUEST AMOUNT</u>	<u>YR. 41 AWARD AMOUNT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>Small Business Technical Assistance Program</u>	<u>NewVue Communities</u> (formerly Twin Cities CDC)	<u>\$25,000</u>	<u>\$20,000</u>	<u>120</u>

Summary: Project funds will provide outreach and technical assistance to businesses. This program leverages loans for small businesses. Additional staff time will be used to address business development related to the North of Main Street project. It is estimated that 40 businesses will be served (unduplicated count), 60 jobs will be created/retained, 40 businesses will be counseled, 4 loans with a value of \$100,000 total will be facilitated, 25 business plans will be developed and 10 businesses will be trained. Funds will be used to pay staff salary. The CDC recently changed its name to NewVue Communities in 2015 and expanded its service area to include all of North Central Massachusetts. The office is located at 470 Main Street.

Larry Casassa addressed this application. He said this program has been funded for several years. It provides technical assistance to start-up and existing businesses in Fitchburg that need assistance with business plans (and also marketing and financing). It leverages many more dollars than the request amount. North of Main Street includes Main, Prichard and Elm Streets, and the college neighborhood. Marc Dohan added that the agency packaged \$2million in loans through this program, however, not all were for Fitchburg businesses.

<u>TOTAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS (1)</u>	<u>\$25,000.00</u>
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CLEARANCE ACTIVITIES

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>SPONSOR</u>	<u>YR. 42 REQUEST AMOUNT</u>	<u>YR. 41 AWARD AMOUNT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>Demolition</u>	<u>Fitchburg Community Development Department</u>	<u>\$300,000</u>	<u>\$29,280.97</u>	<u>136</u>

Summary: Project funds will be used to remove abandoned structures primarily in the CDBG strategy area, which pose an imminent threat to public safety and which contribute to slums and blight, although the entire city is CDBG eligible. It is estimated that 8 buildings containing up to 20 units will be demolished. Consultants will be hired for specific expertise such as environmental assessment or engineering services.

Larry Casassa addressed this application. In collaboration with the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority, the city has been able to take down several dilapidated buildings. Recently, city funds were used to help take down the Central Steam Plant. The total cost of that project was approximately \$700,000. The focus of future demolition activity will be on city buildings including, the former Central Fire Station and

Central Alarm buildings (across from the Police Station) and the Rollstone Street School.

Councilors Paul Beauchemin & Mike Kuchmerek, and Tom Donnelly, from the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority Board, all spoke in favor of demolition activities.

TOTAL CLEARANCE PROPOSALS (1)

\$300,000.00

REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>SPONSOR</u>	<u>YR. 42 REQUEST AMOUNT</u>	<u>YR. 41 AWARD AMOUNT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>Code Enforcement</u>	<u>Fitchburg Building Department</u>	<u>\$49,000</u>	<u>\$49,000</u>	<u>139</u>

Summary: Project funds will be used to pay 50% of one existing full-time Building Inspector position and 50% of one full-time Clerk position. Through enforcement of the State's Sanitary and Building Codes, Fitchburg's housing stock will be greatly improved. To be eligible, this activity must be part of a comprehensive strategy to arrest deterioration, including housing rehab and demolition. It is estimated that 1,500 housing units (duplicated count) will be inspected in the CDBG strategy area.

Robert Lanciani, from the Building Department, addressed this application. CDBG funds will be used to pay a portion of one inspector position in the CDBG Strategy Area. More focus will be placed on educating homeowners, which will result in less time spent in court because property owners and tenants will be better educated.

Larry Casassa said that Code Enforcement is an eligible activity as part of an overall strategy to eliminate slums and blight. It is not eligible as a stand-alone activity. It is a multi-faceted strategy that includes housing rehab, demolition and code enforcement.

<u>Code Enforcement</u>	<u>Fitchburg BOH</u>	<u>\$143,000</u>	<u>\$140,000</u>	<u>146</u>
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Summary: Project funds will be used to pay 100% of two existing full-time BOH Inspector positions and 50% of one full-time Clerk position. Through the enforcement of the State's Sanitary and Building Codes, Fitchburg's housing stock will be greatly improved. To be eligible, this activity must be part of a comprehensive strategy to arrest deterioration, including housing rehab and demolition. It is estimated that 2,000 housing units (duplicated count) will be inspected in the CDBG strategy area.

Steve Curry, from the Board of Health, addressed this application. He said that demolition activity is the result of buildings being condemned by the BOH. Funds will be used to pay for two full time inspector positions in the CDBG Strategy Area. In addition to dilapidated buildings, trash and abandoned cars contribute to blight. Last year 8 properties went into receivership. The Department expects 10 more properties will go into receivership this year.

Councilor Beauchemin spoke in favor of this application.

TOTAL REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION PROPOSALS (2) **\$192,000.00**

PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

<u>ROJECT</u>	<u>SPONSOR</u>	<u>YR. 42 REQUEST AMOUNT</u>	<u>YR. 41 AWARD AMOUNT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>CDBG Administration</u>	<u>Fitchburg Community Development Department</u>	<u>\$217,000</u>	<u>\$217,000</u>	<u>154</u>

Summary: Project funds will be used to provide for the necessary administration of CDBG programs and sub-recipient contracts in accordance with federal guidelines, including staffing, technical services and planning activities. This also includes grant writing and administration of grant projects, which help leverage several million dollars in additional state and federal grants.

Larry Casassa addressed this application. Funds are used to support staff salaries which address duties and planning activities of the CDBG Program. In addition, CDBG dollars leverage a significant amount of state and federal competitive grants, which often do not provide administrative funding.

TOTAL PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION PROPOSAL (1) **\$217,000**

The public hearing closed at 8:00p.m.

Submitted by Mary McCaffrey
Community Development Department

After the CDBG public hearing portion of meeting adjourned,

Other Business:

Discussion of Special Permit application referred to Planning Board by City Council for comments: Lemay, 148 Myrtle St. - Re-use a nonconforming 4-unit building that has been unused >2 years. Board commented that it is already a dense area, however, the Board does not want the property to be another abandoned multifamily. As an alternative, the Board recommends that:

- The structure have less than 4 dwelling units
- That there be adequate off-street parking (two per unit) for the number of units, to be demonstrated on a submitted plan.
- That a Special Permit condition be added requiring that the structure be brought up to all current Codes. For safety reasons it is also recommended that the barn either be brought up to code or demolished.

Motion made (Mr. Fontaine) & seconded (Mr. Hurley) to send the recommendation above.
Vote: 6-0 in favor